

# PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT

First Delegated Legislation Committee

DRAFT FLAGS (NORTHERN IRELAND)  
(AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS 2021

*Wednesday 5 January 2022*

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**not later than**

**Sunday 9 January 2022**

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**The Committee consisted of the following Members:**

*Chair:* † MR VIRENDRA SHARMA

Ali, Rushanara (*Bethnal Green and Bow*) (Lab)  
 † Antoniazzi, Tonia (*Gower*) (Lab)  
 † Baker, Mr Steve (*Wycombe*) (Con)  
 † Burns, Conor (*Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office*)  
 † Daly, James (*Bury North*) (Con)  
 † Eastwood, Mark (*Dewsbury*) (Con)  
 † Fletcher, Nick (*Don Valley*) (Con)  
 Gardiner, Barry (*Brent North*) (Lab)  
 † Grundy, James (*Leigh*) (Con)  
 † Gullis, Jonathan (*Stoke-on-Trent North*) (Con)

† Hall, Luke (*Thornbury and Yate*) (Con)  
 † Jenkins, Andrea (*Morley and Outwood*) (Con)  
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma (*South Shields*) (Lab)  
 McDonagh, Siobhain (*Mitcham and Morden*) (Lab)  
 † Owatemi, Taiwo (*Coventry North West*) (Lab)  
 Shannon, Jim (*Strangford*) (DUP)  
 † Timpson, Edward (*Eddisbury*) (Con)

Sarah Ioannou, *Committee Clerk*

† **attended the Committee**

# First Delegated Legislation Committee

Wednesday 5 January 2022

[MR VIRENDRA SHARMA *in the Chair*]

## Draft Flags (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 2021

4.30 pm

**The Chair:** Happy new year to all. I remind Members to observe social distancing and to sit only in places that are clearly marked. I also remind Members that Mr Speaker has stated that masks should be worn in Committee. *Hansard* colleagues will be most grateful if Members send their speaking notes to [hansardnotes@parliament.uk](mailto:hansardnotes@parliament.uk).

**The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Conor Burns):** I beg to move,

That the Committee has considered the draft Flags (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 2021.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma. I reciprocate your happy new year wishes to you and other members of the Committee.

The draft regulations were laid before the House on 23 November. The flying of flags from Government and court buildings in Northern Ireland is regulated under the Flags Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000. Those regulations provide that on certain designated days the Union flag, and in certain circumstances other flags, must be flown on Government buildings. The regulations reflect our Belfast agreement commitments in respect of flags and emblems, and our “New decade, New approach” commitment to align the designated days for flag flying from Government buildings in Northern Ireland with those in the rest of the United Kingdom.

For the purposes of the 2000 regulations, a Northern Ireland Government building is defined as a building that is wholly or mainly occupied by members of the Northern Ireland civil service. In 2002, the flag-flying requirements in the regulations were extended to include court buildings in Northern Ireland. The regulations also stipulated a number of “specified...buildings” on which the Union flag must be flown on the designated days in question. The buildings were specified at the time that the 2000 regulations were made because they were the headquarters of Northern Ireland Departments.

The draft statutory instrument before the Committee amends the 2000 regulations following the sad passing of His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh last year. In his remarkable lifetime of service, His Royal Highness made 56 visits to Northern Ireland. The fact that so many people from all communities in Northern Ireland paid their tribute to him shows the esteem in which he was held by all, not least in his steadfast support of Her Majesty the Queen over so many decades.

The draft regulations necessarily amend the 2000 regulations in four different ways: first, they remove the birthday of His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh as a designated day; secondly, they remove the wedding day of Her Majesty the Queen as another designated day; thirdly, they provide that the Union flag need not be flown on the designated day relating to a member of the royal family who has died; and, fourthly and finally, they will provide for the Union flag to fly on the proclamation of a new monarch. The existing regulations only make provision for half-masting in the event of the death of a member of the royal family, or of a serving or former Prime Minister.

The Flags (Northern Ireland) Order 2000 sets out the process that must be followed in order to make regulations on the flying of flags on Government buildings and court houses. That includes referring a draft of proposed regulations to the Northern Ireland Assembly for it to consider and report its views to the Secretary of State. This draft instrument was referred to the Assembly on 13 October, and the Assembly reported back on 9 November; I place on the record our appreciation of the Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly for their contributions to the debate in the Assembly the day before.

The 2000 flags order requires that regard be shown to the Belfast agreement when making or amending flags regulations. I am satisfied that the draft regulations, like the 2000 regulations that they amend, do indeed do so. I commend them to the Committee.

4.34 pm

**Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab):** It is an honour to serve under your chairship, Mr Sharma.

I will keep my comments brief. I pass on my thanks to the Minister for his engagement on this issue. The draft instrument is largely a technical amendment to dates on which the Union flag is flown over Government buildings in Northern Ireland following the sad death of His Royal Highness Prince Philip last year, after his lifetime of public service. I take the opportunity to pay tribute to his work in Northern Ireland and to reiterate my condolences to Her Majesty the Queen and the royal family.

The draft regulations also make provision for the succession of a new monarch, when that situation arises. They will bring Government buildings in Northern Ireland into line with those in Wales, Scotland and England. This amendment represents sad but necessary arrangements that need to be made, and we will support it.

I also welcome keeping lines of communication with all parties in Northern Ireland and the Government open on this and other issues that affect the people of Northern Ireland to ensure that they continue to be a valued part of the United Kingdom. I thank the Minister and you, Mr Sharma.

*Question put and agreed to.*

4.35 pm

*Committee rose.*